



Catharine Kendall Emerald
 Department of Public Safety Officer Chris Rouse talks with the Residential Adviser of Henderson Hall, Sarah Robar, and the RA of Debusk Hall, Nick Rountree.

DPS

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basis, it's going to help students ... feel more comfortable," said Sandy Schoonover, director of residence life for University Housing.

Planning for the new sub-station was completed over the summer, she said, but there are still several details that need to be worked out. The hope was that the sub-station would be up and running by the end of this week.

With a schedule covering mainly evenings and weekends, the three officers will be stationed in Hawthorne 115 in the Walton Complex.

Aside from answering calls from the halls and being resources for both students and housing staff, the officers will accompany different sets of resident assistants on their rounds every few nights.

The officers are not there to hand out tickets to the students, Schoonover emphasized; rather, they are there to "build community, get to know the students, and get to know the student staff," she said.

Fitzpatrick added that he hopes DPS will be seen more as a resource than as an entity of law enforcement.

"We don't want to be intrusive. We just want to be readily available," he said. "I strongly believe [this program] can work and will work."

There is reason to believe it will work. At the University of South Dakota where Schoonover previously worked, a similar program was instituted five years ago.

"It worked out fabulously," Schoonover said. It functioned so well that the officers would even come into the halls and play pool with students.

"It was an amazing transformation, and that's something that I'm certainly hoping will happen here," she said.

In the past, relations have been strained between students and DPS, largely because officers would only call on the residence halls during crisis situations, Schoonover said. Not only did that take away from good relations, but "there's a tremendous amount of distrust that has been built around it," she said.

Another contributing factor was that several officers answered calls. Now, Schoonover said, there are three officers whose primary responsibility will be the residence halls.

Familiarity, DPS and Housing hope, will ease the tension felt in any crisis situations encountered throughout the year.

It seems the effects are already being felt among some of the RAs.

Returning RA Nick Rountree, a senior Spanish major and CIT minor, said the biggest difference this year will be the personalities of the officers.

In the past, he said, DPS officers came off as stern and hardly smiled. However, upon meeting the three officers assigned to the residence halls, Rountree's attitude changed.

The officers had volunteered and were interviewed for the positions, and Rountree saw a definite difference.

"I find them to be very intelligent and very friendly," he said.

In addition, RAs may now ask the officers to step back in a situation if they feel they should be handling it themselves. Rountree said this should help students see that RAs are not cops and are not out to ruin them.

Jessica Lane, a senior fine arts major and the assistant complex director for Bean, said that the officers being stationed in the halls and coming on rounds with RAs should improve communication.

Reactions among returning residents are of both disinterest and unease.

Junior English major Max Lewis said that he's never had a problem with DPS before, so he doesn't feel threatened by the officers' presence.

But Zak Scotton, an undeclared sophomore, had a different view.

"I don't see a purpose in it. That's my main problem with it," he said. "I think nobody likes DPS, so I think it's going to bother people having them go on the rounds ... And nobody likes the RAs that go on rounds either, because they're enforcing rules."

DPS Assistant Director Tom Hicks said the program will be evaluated at the end of the year to determine its effectiveness.

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